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SUBJECT: KWAZULU NATAL'S NEW PREMIER: ZWELI MKHIZE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. On May 11, 2009 Zweli Mkhize was sworn in as KwaZulu Natal's (KZN) fifth post-apartheid premier. He is a medical doctor and has served as KZN Minister of Health and Minister of Finance and Economic Development. Mkhize is a close confidant of South African President Jacob Zuma. It remains to be seen how long he will serve as premier of KZN, given that the ANC has consolidated its power in the province and that Mkhize has strong political and leadership skills, in addition to his close relationship with the President. End Comment.

Overview

¶2. (U) Zweli Lawrence Mkhize was born just outside of Pietermaritzburg, KZN in the rural village of Willowfountain on February 2, 1956. He studied medicine in university and did an internship at Durban's non-profit McCord Hospital, which was founded in 1909 by U.S. missionary surgeon James McCord and retains linkages to the United States. He graduated from the University of KZN Medical School in 1982 and began practicing medicine in 1983. In 1986, Mkhize went into political exile but continued his medical practice in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. He returned to South Africa in 1991 to work at a hospital in Mpumalanga but soon returned to the Pietermaritzburg area and established a private practice. He has three children and is married to Dr. May Mashego.

Political Career

¶3. (U) From 1991 to 1994, Mkhize was a member of the ANC's Health Secretariat which was responsible for developing the ANC's health policy for post-apartheid South Africa. Mkhize served as KZN Minister of Health from 1994 to 2004, during which time he established a HIV/AIDS treatment program in KZN in defiance of the national government's stance, and worked closely with U.S. government partners from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). (Note: In meetings with the CG and visiting U.S. delegations from business and local government, he has readily acknowledged the major contributions that PEPFAR has made to expanding AIDS treatment availability. End note.) He was KZN Minister of Finance and Economic Development from 2004 to 2009 and was appointed ANC Provincial Chairperson in 2008. Mkhize is a member of the ANC National Executive Committee and the chairperson of the ANC's National Education and Health subcommittee. He co-founded the Regional Health Forum and is a member of the National Health Forum. He also chairs the 2010 FIFA World Cup Political Oversight Committee. In his capacity as Premier, he also serves in the honorary position of Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu Natal.

¶4. (SBU) As a leader in the province, Mkhize has played a

critical role in the promotion of peace and stability in KZN. Former KZN Premier, Sibusiso Ndebele, was often confrontational with opposition parties, but Mkhize worked behind the scenes as a mediator and helped to establish a coalition government in the province. Mkhize is also credited for stimulating economic development and growth in KZN by developing policies to support small, medium, and micro enterprises; supporting community-based business initiatives; and by funding youth development programs.

In these roles, he contributed to the development of the KZN's health and fiscal policies and engaged the private sector to enhance KZN's investment potential.

15. (SBU) Mkhize has a history of being involved in political violence in the Pietermaritzburg area during the 1980's and has been investigated for his role in a number of political killings in the province, but has never been charged.

Leadership Style

16. (SBU) Mkhize is a very down-to-earth and popular leader. His style of leadership and management is moderate, accommodating, inclusive, and tolerant - a contrast to outgoing Premier Ndebele, who was often abrasive, confrontational and standoffish. Mkhize is also known for including diverse groups and opinions in his decision-making process. His new ten-member provincial cabinet (Executive Council) features four female 'Ministers' or MECs (Members of the Executive Council), including one Indian woman and one white woman. His inaugural address on May 11, 2009 was conciliatory and positive, and the opposition Democratic Alliance party's leader in Parliament voiced confidence to CG that the DA could work cooperatively with Premier Mkhize and the ANC in the province.

'Zuma's Closest Confidant'

17. (SBU) Mkhize is a long-time supporter of President Jacob Zuma
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and is considered by many analysts and the national media to be his most trusted advisor. Court transcripts of the 2006 Zuma rape trial revealed that Mkhize facilitated meetings between the alleged rape victim and Zuma to try and prevent the matter from going to court. Mkhize is also believed to be the leader of the faction that opposed Premier Ndebele and President Mbeki in KZN during the last ANC Polokwane National Conference that resulted in the election of Zuma as the ANC president. Mkhize was a strong supporter of Zuma's presidential campaign and worked to win KZN for the ANC.

Mkhize's Challenges as Premier

18. (SBU) Mkhize faces the challenge of meeting voters' high expectations. KZN citizens will expect the delivery of public services to be improved and fast-tracked, especially in rural areas. Mkhize's administration is likely to focus on service delivery and economic growth. It also remains to be seen if KZN will be rewarded with more resources for economic development and service delivery for helping the ANC win the national election. If Mkhize is indeed Zuma's closest confidant, and if Zuma sticks to his promise of rural development, KZN may reap great development rewards. Mkhize must also work to maintain ANC unity in the province as cracks are beginning to emerge in the tripartite alliance. Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) and South Africa Communist Party (SACP), who continue to wield great power in the province, are not happy with some of Mkhize's cabinet appointments. SACP supporters are upset about the removal of Peggy Nkonyeni who served as Minister of Health and had wanted the removal of Bheki Cele, Minister of Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, and Meshack Radebe, Minister of Social Development.

Maintaining the Zulu Vote

19. (SBU) Mkhize's success as a premier may prove critical to maintaining ANC support in KZN especially if Zuma does not run for a second term. Although the ANC lost support in eight

provinces in the recent election, KZN gains offset these losses.

The increase of support in KZN contributed nearly a fifth or two million votes to the ANC's national results. Were it not for the ANC's impressive performance in KZN, the ruling party's majority could have been reduced to below 60 percent. If the ANC continues its inroads into KZN, it could reap a further 780,000 votes from KZN in 2014.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) It remains to be seen how long Mkhize will stay on as Premier of KZN. He has been marked for national service and was nominated to be Deputy Minister of Finance under President Motlanthe. This idea was fiercely opposed by ANC KZN leaders, who needed Mkhize's leadership to deliver the province to the ANC in the 2009 election. We expect that now that KZN is firmly in the hands of the ANC, Mkhize will likely serve as KZN premier for two or so years, after which he will move on to become the national Minister of Health or Finance.

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